IN THE VACATION PLAYGROUNDS

Strenuous Times in the Organized Games Which Keep the Children Quiet.

Eighty-four vacation schools have just been opened for the use of school children and, incidentally, for the relief of parents. Well attended as the vacation schools are when it comes to a question of voting, it is on the plank of the vacation playgrounds that the majority of the children prefer to stand.

The vacation playgrounds follow the schools. The latter hold session in the morning, the former from 1 to 5:30 o'clock in the afternoon. Most of the children go home to the midday meal. A few bring bread and butter and eat it surreptitiously. At 5:30 the teachers are ready to cry "Halt!" It is a strenuous time for them.

The vacation playground is a continuous performance, and a child has the privilege of going home whenever he pleases. He can go and come three or four times a day. He is not bound to any special time, but, as may be imagined, he comes early and stays late, and it is not until the big doors swing into place that he is finally ejected.

The school playgrounds—that is, the basements of the big buildings with the adjoining yards—the floors asphalted and with alluring pillars and partitions for hide and seek games, afford just the space needed; and these basements are usually fairly cool and comfortable even in the hot days. At the side, running water and many basins invite to mopped brows and cooled-off hands when play becomes too strenuous.

The children come with bright faces, clean dresses, if girls, and clean shirts if boys. The playgrounds are clean, and at the end of the day's sport the children are fresh and wholesome looking, which must be another joy to the parent who has suffered from the effect of the open streets on the children's clothes.

Entering the girls' side—for boys and girls are carefully divided like the sheep and goats of scriptural injunction—youngsters, in pink, white and blue, of ages varying from 3 to 15, are found at all sorts of games. The teacher, in a becoming gymnasium suit, is all over the place organizing the classes. These are the first days.

"One has to be very careful in this matter," she explains, "for you can't let them all play the same games. The little ones could not stand the strain of competition with the older ones, so we have to keep them apart and only allow the smaller ones to play the games suited to them."

The children gather about while the teacher is talking and supplement her information with little scraps of their own.

One of them is a little mother, with big, black eyes and golden hair. She has a big armful of child clothed in one garment and blissfully sucking the end of a bun. Asked the bundle's name, she responds with a lisp, "Araminta," and adds that Araminta is her niece. She can't mean niece, but the nod is emphatic, and niece it has to be.

Obediently she puts the bundle on the

THE STATUE IN THE WALL.

floor and Araminta sits on the asphalt and finishes her bun, while the patient aunt stands and watches her as a miser watches his bag of gold. Araminta does not look unlike a tiny bag of gold, with her yellow curls and yellow undergarment of unbleached cotton cloth.

While the visitors are wondering at Araminta's appetite, the older girls with a whoop of delight are forming at one end of the outer court preparatory to making the running high jump. The rope is placed a foot from the ground and gradually raised to a height of four feet. Some of the older girls, with tall, lithe figures, make the jump easily; others catch their feet on the rope and fall into the arms of a teacher, who is there to catch them one by one and who shows not the slightest fatigue in the operation.

Any mistake in the jump, balking, catching the feet in the rope is met with whoops of derision; the perfect leap by an "ah!" of satisfaction. Rivalry is keen, and the criticism and approval of companions is an incentive to effort.

At this moment the visitors catch sight of the windows of the room supposed to separate the boys' from the girls' playground. These casings at present form a frame in which is inset a cluster of half ashamed, half satirical masculine faces, which pop out of sight as soon as the eyes of the teacher turn that way.

A small boy, with carrotty hair and cinnamon freckles, woollen cap pulled down to the edge of his flapping ears, is addressed.

"What are you doing on this side of the house? This isn't your playground. You ought to be ashamed to come in and peek at the girls."

He looks at the questioner with a cynical wink, backs away out of reach of a possible projectile and says:

"We just wanted to see 'em jump."

And his satellites take up the refrain.

"See 'em jump!" With contortions of mirth and supercilious grins.

It is a noticeable fact that the girls are indifferent as to the ways the boys amuse themselves. Not one of them is seen to cross the separating space and "peek." But the boys' invasion is continual.

One strenuous Romeo takes a balcony and tempts a Juliet, not with fair words, but with chewing gum, as he balances himself on the edge of the window sill and keeps a furtive eye out for future Juliets in case this one proves refractory. Little intruders who seem like ripe peas bursting from their pods of tight drawn knickerbockers sit or stand about the girls' playground. The teacher pushes them aside occasionally in her rounds, and the girls pick them up or give them drinking water or half a dozen other feminine cares are expended on them with delightful indif-

A GAME OF CHECKERS.

ference as to relationship. One boy too big to cry, but who will cry in spite of the comforting words of the visitors, whimpers as he is led away to the boys' playground:

"I want to stay with me sister."

The jumping is followed by music drill. It is a picturesque sight. All the children, irrespective of age and size, choose partners and form in a long line, two by two, on the inside; the teacher gives the step, "right foot forward, toes touching, right foot back, one, two, three," the piano plays a lively march, and back and forth, up and down untiringly, the procession moves.

Music drill is followed by basketball, a game from which the younger ones are excluded. To them in turn are given the kindergarten supplies, the sand tables, gold fish to watch, pieces of raffia to twist into pretty shapes, colored papers, paint boxes and squares of paper on which the most astonishing birds and animals, not to be

A MODERN ROMEO.

matched anywhere outside of The Bronx, spring into life under facile fingers. On the blackboard, butterflies and bees and strange waving things said to be trees appear in colored chalk.

The children are called away in half an hour or so to take part again in a music drill or some game in which all can participate.

"What we try to do," explains the teacher, "is to keep the children constantly occupied and entertained. No matter how interesting the game may be, they soon tire of it, and unless something else is provided they begin to be unruly. That is the only thing we have to guard against.

"All the children are healthy and strong and full of life. Merely playing soon wearies them, unless they can turn to something else; that is where the kindergarten games and the manual training, bits of embroidery, construction work, &c., come in."

Reference was made to the criticism of such training by Mrs. Mathilde Coffin Ford, who, Comptroller Grout says, has a national reputation in educational circles, on the ground that it is a waste of time and material.

"The only answer I can make," says Teacher, "is found in the later results of the work. When the children begin with doll houses, and dummy kitchens, and boxes and all that, it certainly does not seem that the work is leading to any definite result. But when you follow the child from class to class and from promotion to promotion and see the principle of designing and construction develop, it is very interesting. Before a girl gets through she is fitted to design and make her own shirtwaists and hats, to embroider and to design every sort of useful household thing. All that work means a great deal to the children, most of whom will certainly have to do all these things when they leave school, and even before.

THE STRENUOUS THIRST FOR KNOWLEDGE.

As an example of the children's feelings on the subject, the girls were asked to vote on the favorite game in the playground. Basketball received the most votes. Manual training, in turn, was almost unanimously voted to be the most interesting study in the vacation schools.

"Of course, we understand that the children's vote does not count for much," said Teacher, "for above all else children love to work on the tangible; they like to see the result of their efforts take shape and form. Arithmetic, geography, study in general mean little to them except a necessary labor; and the advantages of being educated do not penetrate their comprehension to a startling extent. But manual training means something to them and will always be popular on that account."

Across the room from the girls' playground a sound like surf beating on a rock announced that the boys were here.

They were. Two long lines of masculine promises outlined the fences of the outer court and the star performers, fingers on the ground at the goal and backs bent almost double, awaited the signal. It was the popular relay race and each side watched and encouraged its representative heartily.

Basketball seems to be the one game that girls play which the boys do not utterly despise. That, with the horizontal bars, parallel bars, leap frog and wrestling engaged the attention of all the boys who were not engaged in watching what the girls were doing.

"This school," said the young athlete who was drilling the boys, "is typical. The attendance is about 400 and they are a pretty well behaved lot. So long as we keep them amused we have no trouble. When they get tired, they go home or sit around until they are arrested. If you want to see what the vacation school really does for the hoodlum, just go to one of the tough places and then you'll realize what an enormous boon it is to keep the children off the streets, not only for themselves but for the city itself."

The tough school deserved its name. There is more than one of the kind, but they are much alike in the restive character of the occupants, and the increased responsibility of the teachers.

At the entrance stands the stalwart bluecoat, unmoved by the terrific noise in the rear. Behind him the first glance discloses a muscular young man with bare arms, a red and blue striped jersey, linen trousers and gymnasium shoes, braced against the door by his feet, his hair standing on end. Facing him are two score boys in a writhing mass of legs and arms as they try to pass him and ascend the stairs in a body instead of single file, as he has determined.

Might against might has a tough struggle. Finally, the teacher, with perspiration standing in beads on his face and neck, wins the day, and the boys obey and like lambs respond to numbers and form in a waiting line.

"They're just anxious to get to the library," says the Muscular One. He explains afterward that he is a medical student in the winter and gymnastic teacher in the vacation school in the summer.

"You don't mean to say that those young hoodlums were fighting that way just to go up stairs and read?"

The teacher nodded. "That's nothing; that's just their way. You must remember you're in a tough part of the town."

The library, where not only books of adventure and war stories are provided, but also quiet games, parcheesi, checkers and dominoes, has a quieting influence on the boys, already worn out with their livelier exercise. Hoodlums below, upstairs it needs little more than a word from the young woman presiding over the imaginations of the vacation boys to quiet the most turbulent.

The muscular M. D. describes his day's work.

"I begin by giving the boys a talk, telling them how to behave, and especially about cleanliness; occasionally I talk about their food and drink. That is a hygienic fad of mine, but I try to make the talk concise and suited to their special needs. When that is over we have the military drill, while the girls have their music drill; then a series of games. There are about four or five hundred boys here, and it's pretty hard at times.

"Their popular games are wrestling—Chinese wrestling and leg wrestling. Then they are specially fond of a game taught me in a German university, called the strap game. This is played with a strap from which the buckle has been removed. The boys stand in a circle and the boy who has the strap hits the boy on his right and then chases him about the room. It is a game that simply calls into play great activity and quickness.

"Then there are the potato races. In these we sometimes let the boys and girls play together, and we usually put a girl up against a much smaller boy, so that the girls can feel pleased with themselves and the boys work harder.

"We can't let the girls and boys play together very much in this part of town, for the same reason that Father Curry objected to their freedom on the recreation piers. They are a very unmoral class and need the closest looking after."

A MUSIC DRILL IN THE TWENTY-SEVENTH STREET SCHOOL.

The muscular M. D. spoke of the needs of the children.

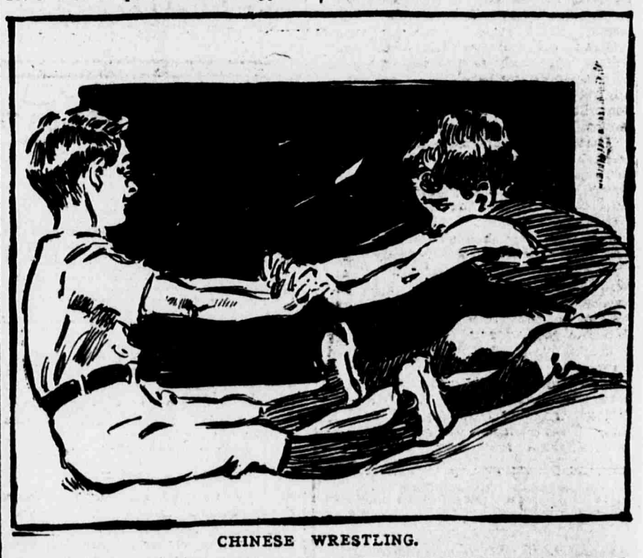
"I wish some philanthropist who doesn't know how to spend his money would send these children outfits. The Board of Education provides books and supplies for games, but it does not provide suitable apparel. Every boy who comes here ought to have a sweater or light jersey and a pair of gymnasium shoes. The latter are almost a necessity, for in the strenuous games, the boys are likely to hurt each other with the great heavy-heeled shoes they wear. Several times I have been quite seriously hurt. Some of the boys come barefoot, but that is worse, for they can cut their feet on broken bits of glass or sharp stones. We have a crying need for gymnasium shoes, and of course the children can't afford to buy them.

"We keep up the interest of the children by offering prizes for the best record. Each principal usually gives a prize and then there are the inter-playground contests in which all the vacation playgrounds try for the medals at the end of summer.

"What do I think the moral effect of the vacation schools is? I don't think it can be overestimated. Leaving out personal feeling in the matter, I felt tremendously sorry when I heard the report early in the spring that the vacation playgrounds would be closed, for I realized what that meant to the morals and the health of the children, and through the children to the entire city."

Even the crippled children are not excluded from the playgrounds. In some of the lower East Side schools there are a number of the lame and halt to whom special attention and instruction is given. They take part in the lighter games, and read, use the kindergarten supplies, and are the pets and care of the little mothers and fathers who surround them.

Altogether, the vacation playgrounds are an anchor to windward in the progress of race evolution.



CHINESE WRESTLING.

THE HURDLE IS A POPULAR PASTIME.

REST ALCOVES FOR MEN.

He was a small, seedy man with a nervously assertive manner. His straw hat was of last year's vintage, he needed a shave, and he was not very young. But he had not lost interest in life or confidence in his future. He picked up the glass of beer to which an old friend was treating him, blew the froth aside, dipped into it and began:

"I have a brand new business idea. Nobody has ever thought of it, so far as I can find out, in any part of the world. Anyway, no place needs it as much as New York. When I get it going I shall not only be assured of a competence, but I will be hailed as a public benefactor.

"I am only waiting to raise the capital to put the idea in operation—$20,000 or so. It is not very expensive to begin, and it means profit from the very start."

He absorbed half the beer and waited till the question came. Then:

"Rest alcoves!" said he. "Rest alcoves for tired men. That's my idea. I tell you they're the biggest need of the busy male population to-day. What is the tired man to do in New York? The only rest for him in the whole city, unless he has a club, is the saloon, and he can't rest there. How often have you heard a man say, 'I would give $10 for a chance to lie down for a few minutes,' or 'I would give a day's pay for half an hour's sleep,' or some similar expression? Why, you hear it every day, and what's more the men who say it mean it. They are dying for a rest, but they can't get it. Now, my idea is to give it to 'em.

"I propose to hire a big, cool, airy loft, or two lofts, in as quiet a block as one can find right off Broadway. I will divide the place up into little rooms, say 8 by 10 with six or seven foot partitions—in front nothing but heavy curtains. Each room will contain just a chair and a divan—looking glass on the wall, of course, with comb and brush and with pegs to hang up outer clothing. In winter the place will be kept comfortably warm and ventilated by electric exhaust apparatus. In summer, screens will keep out flies. Pure air will be drawn from above the roof level by the electric apparatus, and the place will be kept cool by all sorts of devices to keep the air constantly in motion.

"Patronage? Why, sir, that place won't be open a week before I'll be renting the rest of the building and looking for sites for branch rest resorts. Wait and see.

"Say a man has to get up earlier than usual. He is so tired by noon that he is unfit to do business. Or a salesman has a killing morning showing goods, or a lawyer wears himself out in the first half of the day, and finds he cannot tackle a new job with clear head until he gets some rest. You see? He takes a rest alcove. He goes to sleep at once amid the quiet, beautiful surroundings—I will have the place made simple, but luxurious. The cool or the warm atmosphere, as the case may be, soothes his nerves. He awakes fit for anything. You know what even a five minutes' nap means to most men. See?

"Or take the case of the fellow who has worked a long, trying day, and has a long, trying evening before him. Perhaps he has to go to a dinner party, or perhaps he is to take his wife to the theatre or his girl to Coney Island. Oh, what he would give for half an hour's rest! But home is too far, and a hotel is too dear and too elaborate; so he just tries to prime himself up with stimulants. When my place is open he'll come in and lie down, sleep half an hour, dream in comfort and step out a new man.

"The prices must be reasonable—say, 25 cents for the first half hour and 10 cents or 15 for each succeeding one. Who would grudge it? I think it will pay at that tariff. With forty alcoves I can average at least $10 an hour for ten hours a day. Money may be made, too, by renting barber shop, bath and soft drink privileges.

"Of course, extreme respectability must be maintained—no liquor, no gambling, no noise; absolute refinement and quiet will be the watchwords. The place will be strictly for men. Indeed, women have no need for it. Up to 6 o'clock in the evening they have practically the sort of accommodation I describe in the department stores. Every one of these has a handsome ladies' parlor, with lounges; and the women, when they are tired rushing the bargain counters, go in there and lie down. Some of the big railway stations have them, too. But nobody seems to think that a man has a right to get tired."

LESSONS IN ENGLISH NEEDED.

"One of the hardest tasks in the evening high schools," said the principal of one of them, "is to find out just what the pupils want to study.

"Evening high school pupils are none of them boys and girls; they are either youths and young women or men and women full grown, sometimes gray haired. They come with the vaguest of ideas, and when you ask them what course they want to take, as often as not have no choice.

"I sometimes think very little choice should be given them, and that they ought in the beginning to be put in a sort of preparatory class to find out just what it is they need, before starting on a two, three or four year course, often to lose valuable time before they discover they are on the wrong track.

"One of the commonest of all their mistakes is the failure to understand what is meant by the study of English. They think usually that it is a course that would teach them to speak English, something for foreigners who need a working knowledge of the tongue of this country. Some of them have resented my asking them if they desired this course. They took it for granted that since they spoke English they must know all they needed to know about it.

"That discovery made me gasp at first, and I pondered long before I found a proper way to get around the difficulty. Most of them were quite sensitive on the subject, for the less some people know the more anxious are they to have it understood that they know that little thoroughly.

"But I have found a way. I take a few of them into a small room together and start a debating club, or something of that sort. I tried this with half a dozen young men and women the first time, and in three weeks I had them all clamoring to change their courses for English. More than one man told me that this was the course he had always wanted, but did not know what it was called. One said that if he had known sooner what the English course was he would have saved nearly a year in night school.

"It is very much the same about spelling. Scores of our pupils are very sensitive on this point, and if caught in an error in spelling act as if they had committed a crime. I really don't think many of us who have had the advantage of a good education, realize how dense the ignorance on those two subjects, English and spelling, is among those who have not been so fortunate. They seem to have the idea that since they are born to the English language they know how to speak and to spell it as a sort of birthright; why, some of them often try to teach it to acquaintances fresh from Germany, France, Italy and other countries, and with all the assurance in the world of being thoroughly capable.

"Strange, isn't it? I find one of the most interesting phases of my night school work lies in my efforts to root out this impression wherever I find it existing, and in using what tact I possess so as not to throw the searchlight on the pupils' ignorance so abruptly as to discourage them utterly."